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Title: Review of *A Reading of Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense* by Mehdi Parsa

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Review of *A Reading of Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense* by Mehdi Parsa

Mehdi Parsa, *A Reading of Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). 301 pp. Softbound. ISBN: 978-3-031-13708-2.

Rather than suppose a split between Gilles Deleuze's philosophical projects and his subsequent collaborations with Félix Guattari, Mehdi Parsa contends that Deleuze always remains a philosopher of totality. Parsa argues that Deleuze's aim in the *Logic of Sense* is to detail the passages and relays between surfaces and depths, describing the intersection of ethics and ontology, logic and agency, thought and existence. Derived from his PhD thesis, Parsa first details Deleuze's account of static genesis, the relation between two or more effects. Second, Parsa illustrates Deleuze's transition to dynamic genesis, observing the induction of literary and psychoanalytic language to illustrate how nonsense underlies sense. Lastly, Parsa considers the impacts of this transition on the relationship between the realm of knowledge and the realm of existence.

Parsa begins his analysis by examining Deleuze's third realm: the realm of sense. Deleuze makes a subtle distinction between contradiction and paradox. For Deleuze, difference is ontologically primary and productive of reality. Contradiction, Parsa explains, is "the difference between the concepts and their correlates" (65). Here, difference is secondary, used as a logical measuring stick. Paradox, on the other hand, continues to produce counter-intuitive thoughts after their supposed resolution. Deleuze defines paradox at the beginning of *The Logic of Sense* as "the affirmation of both

senses or directions at once."¹ Lewis Carroll's reimagining of Zeno's paradox demonstrates that even after thousands of years and solutions, knowledge cannot shut down their power. As Parsa puts it, paradox involves "the essential element of change or movement" (132). Operating at the limits of thought, paradoxes indicate the limits of knowledge. Insofar that paradox pulls thought in multiple directions, they point to an excess of knowledge, producing new ways of thinking.

With this in mind, Parsa explains in the introduction that "the genetic logic of sense would be the logic of existence, and the process of making sense is united with the genetic nature of existence" (3). What is at stake for Deleuze in his *Logic of Sense* is an encounter between thought and the material world. Parsa compellingly accounts, "thinking is not repeating existing patterns or representing such patterns but rather a productive intervention in the genesis of being. The realm of existence is not a set of objects (or beings) that can be represented. It is rather composed of the series of events and encounters that entail its genesis" (3). Sense, Parsa continues, "does not deal with concepts" as this relies on intersubjective signification or objective denotation, treating difference as ontologically secondary (4). Instead, sense is the condition and synthesis of ways of thinking and existence, the event that occurs in a proposition. Sense is that which transforms the study of being, into a study of becoming.

Parsa explains that "Deleuze's aim in *Logic of Sense* is to build a Carrollian logic on the basis of the positive function of paradoxes, by introducing the paradoxical element as the element

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas. (London: The Athlone Press), 1.

of logic” (120). Chapters two through five of Parsa’s illuminating analysis, explains how and why Deleuze takes up Frege, the ancient Stoics and Carroll as central figures to elucidate the nature of sense. In the remaining chapters and indicating how this logic of sense is transcendental and synthetic, Parsa explains how sense influences Deleuze’s ontology and ethics.

What is important in Deleuze’s reading of Frege, Parsa argues, is that it establishes the objectivity of sense. With the concept of sense, and in the well-known example of Venus being the morning and evening star, Frege outlines some kind of path of denotation between a proper name and its object. To say the morning star and evening star are identical is not an analytic statement despite having the same referent because of their differing senses. This objectivity leads to what Deleuze calls Frege’s paradox, the “paradox of regress, or of indefinite proliferation.”² Parsa writes that that the paradox arises because of the “essential distinction between what I say and the sense of what I say” (54). This separation means I can never state the sense of what I am saying but can always take the sense of what I say as the object of another proposition. While Frege describes this as a deficiency of language one should strive to overcome, for Deleuze it demonstrates the productivity of paradox. Although the speaker is impotent to state the sense they speak of, it is this gap between sense and speaking sense, that equips language “with the capability to produce an infinite number of entities and an infinite number of names for these entities” (56).

The Stoics present a mystifyingly complex ontology – holding that only corporeal bodies exist while their logic of causation turns on a notion of the incorporeal, what they call “sayables”. What is sayable in a proposition is the “incorporeal attribute or event [...] an

intermediate which relates the proposition as a body to another body” (91). For the Stoics, events are not corporeal bodies but occur between bodies, describing their mixture and power of affect. Events are independent of bodies but are also subsistent to them. This is of note to Deleuze because it describes the syntheticity of sense. Through an analysis of Deleuze’s recourse to Emile Brehier’s *La Théorie des incorporels dans l’ancien stoïcisme*, and for which his translations are to be commended, Parsa argues that Deleuze translates this notion of subsistence to the surface. Parsa tells us that events delineate the “incorporeal surface of bodies” (84). It is at this surface that bodies are produced and transformed. Parsa suggests that this interplay of surface and subsistence is crucial to understanding Deleuze’s immanentalism about sense. Here, one does not inquire to the sense of the event. Rather, “the event is sense itself” (91).

Sense describes the intersection of thought and existence, of logic and ontology. Against the standard view that Deleuze is a philosopher of the surface, Parsa offers a more nuanced view of his immanentalism and argues that Deleuze is a philosopher of surfaces *and* the depths that constitute and break it. To this end, Parsa turns to Deleuze’s analysis of Carrollian logic. Deleuze writes that “nothing is more fragile than the surface.”³ Insisting on the irreducibility and paradox of sense, Parsa argues that the genetic element of the surface of sense the “depth of nonsense” (137). Deleuze turns to Carroll to demonstrate the power of paradoxical thinking and the productivity of nonsense. As much as Deleuze’s focus on Carroll is well known, Parsa makes an artful contribution by positioning common sense and good sense in relation to the dogmatic image of thought. This representational way of thinking is *doxa*. The superposition is that Deleuze analyses Carroll’s logic

² Ibid., 28.

³ Ibid., 82.

of nonsense, *paradoxa*, to illustrate a new image of thought. The purpose of paradoxical thinking, as Parsa explains, is to “perform the transition from the simplified image of thought (by showing its incoherency) to the real image of thought” (120).

Although Parsa makes analogies to the surfaces and depths of Deleuze’s monographs on Kant, Nietzsche and Spinoza, and his collaborative works with Guattari, Parsa does not err in presenting Deleuze’s work as a unified whole. Rather, Parsa’s analysis of Deleuze’s Carroll points to a broken surface that offers new ways of thinking, new ways of sensing. For Parsa, there is “No logic of sense is possible without a logic of nonsense inherent in it; no surface without a depth” (137). This clarifies what Parsa means in calling Deleuze irrational and non-empiricist. This is no negative connotation but establishes Deleuze as both empiricist and rationalist. Pushing logics to their limits, Deleuze is not antirational but hyperrational. Sense forges a “connection between intelligibility and reality” (206). Crucially, this means that sense-data are not passive or pre-formed (284).

In this reading, Parsa does not simply promote a theory of events, but encourages us to consider the ethical and political impacts of knowledge. Sense is synthetic. One is “living the event” (101). Making a distinction between fatalism and necessity, Parsa implies that the freedom to control one’s actions is not diametrically opposed to a theory of how events unfold. Parsa concludes that knowledge is practice, bound up in ethics considerations which results “in discovering an agency … different from the causal agency of objects and conscious agency of subjects” (285). Fate, freedom, and agency are interlinked. This responds to the criticism of Deleuze that he under-theorises agency. Parsa’s project is not to unravel the tensions between Deleuze’s pre-agential metaphysics and his ethical edicts to become-other. With his discussion of fatalism and time, Parsa suggests that Deleuze is acutely aware of the interrelationship between actions and events. Parsa makes an invaluable contribution in locating the ethical and the political in logic – of benefit not just to Deleuze scholars, but those interested in a history of ideas and the intersection of philosophy and psychoanalysis.

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